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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: SUMATE: PRESSURE CONTINUES

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
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SUMMARY

[11](#). (C) Maria Corina Machado, Executive Vice President of the Venezuelan NGO Sumate, said April 11 that judicial and social pressure against Sumate leaders was growing. Machado told poloffs that Venezuelan electoral officials continue to violate electoral law, and said she could not recommend people vote in the present circumstances. Ana Julia Jatar said Sumate was tracking discrimination against the signers of the petitions to convoke the presidential recall referendum. President Hugo Chavez ordered Venezuelan officials to stop using the list of petition signers April [15](#). Chavez's public verbal order renewed debate about the propriety of the GOV using the list to discriminate against opponents. It is unlikely, however, that the President's order will actually halt GOV use of the list. End Summary.

Pressure Continues

[12](#). (C) Maria Corina Machado, Executive Vice President of the NGO Sumate, told poloffs that the four Sumate leaders under investigation for receiving National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funding had once again been called to appear before the prosecutor on April 15. The hearing was postponed until June 10. The case has been suspended by the Supreme Court pending the collection of testimony requested by the defense, including testimony from NED officials. Machado noted that while GOV pressure against the group is based on alleged USG funding, the USG has stood by the group, and made it more difficult for the GOV to prosecute them. Machado said the Spanish Ambassador to Venezuela had told her that the GOV had expressed intense displeasure at President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's meeting with Sumate leaders. She said the GOV was trying to intimidating other countries into staying away from Sumate.

Ongoing Abuses

[13](#). (C) Machado said Sumate has learned that the National Electoral Council (CNE) is operating under a set of 22 regulations which have not been made public. The CNE has also changed 80 electoral districts for the August elections, without National Assembly approval, Machado said. She criticized the CNE's plan to have CAPEL audit the electoral registry, noting that any serious audit would have to examine the national identification process to check for fraudulent naturalizations and the issuance of multiple identification documents, something which would be impossible in the one month process being proposed.

Black List

[14](#). (C) Ana Julia Jatar, who is directing Sumate's investigation of discrimination against the signers of the petitions requesting a recall referendum, told poloffs that millions of Venezuelans were being denied their labor rights, as a result of having signed. People who appeared on the black list were denied jobs, she said, as well as government loans, scholarships, and documents. She compared the practice to South African apartheid. Jatar reported that people were now being offered the opportunity to have their names taken off the list in exchange for money, and that some businesses were resorting to the use of "fronts" to get contracts. Street vendors are reportedly now selling the list, in CD form, advertising it as a way for private businessmen to know who not to hire to avoid problems with the GOV.

Chavez Orders Tascon List Buried

15. (C) In a public broadcast April 15, President Hugo Chavez acknowledged that officials had been using the list

and ordered a halt to its use, saying it was time to "bury the Tascon list." The reference is to Movimiento Quinta Republica Deputy Luis Tascon, who put the data base of those who had signed the petitions requesting a recall referendum on his web site shortly after the signatures were submitted to the CNE. Other officials, including Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello, and Patria Para Todos Secretary General Jose Albornoza praised the President's decision. The discrimination against petition signers had been gaining increasing media coverage in the week preceding Chavez's declaration.

Comment

16. (C) Although still under the prosecutor's eye, Sumate continues to work on keeping the focus on the electoral council's shortcomings, and the implications for elections in Venezuela. Meanwhile, the CNE works to project its image as fair and modern outside Venezuela, while opposition voters lose faith in an institution which manifestly doesn't care if they trust it or not. The Supreme Court followed a similar strategy of building up its international prestige through cooperative projects with the World Bank and the UN, while internally it lost credibility.
Brownfield

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